



Plagiarism as a Moral Crisis in Students: A Normative Ethical Approach

¹Fajar Ahmad, ²Nandana Kaffi Anantara, ³Ulfit Mardhatillah, ⁴Ika Triayu Rahmadiyah, ⁵Muhammad Oktorama Setiawan

^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

^{4,5}Institut Agama Islam Negeri Datuk Laksemang Bengkalis

E-mail: fajarahmad@gmail.com

Info Articles	Abstract
Article History Received: 2025-04-18 Revised: 2025-05-11 Published: 2025-05-30 Keywords: <i>Plagiarism; normative ethics; moral crisis; students; academic integrity.</i>	Plagiarism in academia is a serious violation of ethics and scientific integrity, particularly among students. This phenomenon reflects a moral crisis that not only impacts individual quality but also threatens academic culture as a whole. This study aims to examine plagiarism behavior from a normative ethics perspective, emphasizing the approaches of deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. The method used is a literature study, by analyzing various relevant literature related to academic ethics and morality in higher education. The results of the analysis indicate that plagiarism is not only a form of intellectual dishonesty but also reflects students' weak moral awareness in understanding academic responsibility. The deontological approach views plagiarism as a violation of moral obligations, utilitarianism views it as an act that harms the academic community as a whole, while virtue ethics emphasizes the importance of developing honest and responsible character in individuals. Based on these findings, this study concludes that overcoming plagiarism cannot be done solely through sanctions, but requires a comprehensive and continuous approach to academic ethics education. Education that instills the values of honesty, integrity, and moral responsibility from an early age is key to building a healthy and dignified academic culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism, as the practice of copying or taking another person's ideas, writing, or work without giving proper credit, has become a serious problem in the academic world, particularly in higher education settings.(Aula et al., 2024)The rise in plagiarism among students is not merely an administrative or technical violation, but reflects a deeper crisis of values: a decline in integrity, morals, and moral responsibility. In an academic context, authenticity and intellectual honesty are fundamental principles underlying the entire educational process and the development of knowledge.(Abidin & Harahap, 2025)When this principle is violated, it threatens not only the quality of individual students, but also the credibility of the educational institution as a whole.

The phenomenon of plagiarism shows a degradation of ethical awareness among students, which may be triggered by various factors, such as

academic pressure, weak supervision, lack of understanding of the ethics of scientific writing, and moral unpreparedness in facing intellectual challenges.(Nasywa, 2024)Azhari Akmal Tarigan, in his book *Academic Ethics*, states that plagiarism is a form of deviation from the character of "insan ulul albab" – an ideal person in the view of Islamic education who prioritizes reason, morality, and spirituality.(TARIGAN, 2022)Therefore, the act of plagiarism not only damages the academic reputation of the perpetrator, but also reflects a failure to cultivate good manners as the foundation of knowledge.

Moreover, plagiarism must be understood as an ethical issue, not simply an administrative violation. From an academic ethics perspective, plagiarism requires in-depth philosophical study so that its root causes can be identified and resolved holistically.(Susanto, TTD, Soraya, E., Febriana, A., & Muhidin, 2025)One approach that can be used to understand this behavior is

normative ethics, which encompasses the theories of deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. Through this approach, we can analyze how plagiarism not only contradicts moral obligations (deontology), harms the public interest in academia (utilitarianism), but also demonstrates a failure to foster superior character and integrity (virtue ethics). (Weruin, 2019).

Thus, this paper aims not only to critique the practice of plagiarism from a normative perspective, but also to underscore the importance of values education in shaping students' ethical awareness. Tackling plagiarism cannot be achieved simply by a repressive approach through academic sanctions; it must be accompanied by a preventative strategy that systematically strengthens academic ethics. Education that instills the values of honesty, responsibility, and etiquette from an early age is a key prerequisite for building a healthy, dignified, and sustainable academic culture.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This article was written using the literature study method (*library research*), namely the collection of data and information through written sources such as books, scientific journals, and relevant articles. (Sari, Mike Nurmalia, Nelvia Susmita, 2025). The analysis approach was carried out qualitatively by comparing various normative ethical theories regarding cases of plagiarism among students.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Plagiarism as a Moral Crisis for Students

Plagiarism in the academic world is not merely a form of administrative or technical violation, but rather reflects a fairly serious moral crisis among students. (Nasywa, 2024) In this context, the act of plagiarizing another's work without proper acknowledgement indicates an erosion of the fundamental values that should be the foundation of higher education: honesty, responsibility, and integrity. Students, who should be the primary subjects in the process of seeking and developing knowledge, are often trapped in an instant and pragmatic mindset. An orientation toward end results such as grades, graduation, or recognition

has shifted the true meaning of the academic process, namely as a means of character formation and honest and independent intellectual achievement. (Halim, Angellina Anastasia, 2024).

This culture of academic pragmatism is reinforced by systemic pressures, such as mounting workloads, evaluation systems that tend to emphasize quantitative aspects, and a lack of moral role models from the academic environment. (Syaharani, 2024) In situations like this, plagiarism is considered a legitimate shortcut, as long as it goes undetected. However, as Azahri Akmal Tarigan points out, plagiarism is a form of "betrayal of academic integrity" that not only damages the perpetrator's reputation but also undermines the fundamental values of education itself. He added that plagiarism reflects a learner's weak scientific spirituality, namely a lack of awareness of the noble values that should underlie every academic activity. (TARIGAN, 2022).

Research conducted by Fauziah and Maulana further supports this view. They found that the prevalence of plagiarism is closely correlated with weak character education on campus. The internalization of academic ethics values, such as honesty, responsibility, and discipline, has not been fully and effectively integrated into the curriculum and learning activities. Most higher education institutions still position academic ethics as supplementary knowledge, rather than a core competency that every student must possess. (Fauziah, F., & Maulana, 2020).

This moral crisis becomes more complex when manners, as a value that is deeply rooted in the Islamic educational tradition, are no longer part of the awareness in scientific work. (Al Ghifari, 2025) In Islam, the pursuit of knowledge cannot be separated from the formation of morals and personality. (Hidayat, Tatang, Ahmad Syamsu Rizal, 2018). Therefore, when students commit plagiarism, they are not only violating academic law but also violating more fundamental principles of etiquette and morality. This indicates that character development has not been fully internalized, either through teaching, the example of lecturers, or the academic evaluation system.

Therefore, to fully understand plagiarism, it is important to understand that this problem cannot be resolved solely with repressive approaches, such as imposing sanctions. Plagiarism must be seen as a symptom of a moral crisis and the failure of the education system to instill ethical values. A more fundamental and transformative approach is needed through character education, the cultivation of scientific ethics, and a reformulation of the learning system that not only pursues cognitive achievements but also emphasizes the moral and spiritual development of students.

B. Normative Ethics Approach to Plagiarism: A Study of Deontology, Utilitarianism, and Virtue Ethics

Plagiarism as an academic violation cannot only be analyzed from the administrative rules perspective, but must also be understood through the lens of normative ethics to uncover the moral roots of the act.(Nasywa, 2024). The three main approaches in normative ethics of deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics offer diverse but complementary perspectives in understanding and assessing plagiaristic behavior among students.(Hamzah, Nur, 2025).

1. Deontological Perspective: Violation of Moral Obligations

In the deontological view, as formulated by Immanuel Kant, the morality of an action is not determined by its consequences, but by whether the action is carried out based on universal moral obligations.(Violita, 2023)The main principle of deontology is the categorical imperative, namely that a person must act in accordance with principles that can be made into universal laws.(Izad, 2019)In this context, plagiarism is a violation of these moral principles because it is not done with good and honest intentions, but rather to achieve pragmatic goals such as getting a grade or completing an assignment.

Even though the outcome of plagiarism may appear formally "good" (e.g., a high grade or a completed assignment), the act remains morally wrong because it lacks integrity and a sense of academic responsibility. Ethical decision-making models suggest that students often fail to engage in in-depth moral reflection, thus neglecting

deontological values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect for the work of others.(Violita, 2023)When students plagiarize without ethical consideration, they are essentially violating universal moral principles that are the foundation of academic ethics.

2. Utilitarianism Perspective: Negative Impacts Outweigh the Benefits

The utilitarian approach, developed by figures such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, views ethics from the perspective of consequences. An action is considered right if it provides the greatest benefit or happiness for the greatest number of people.(Mill, 2020). Within this framework, plagiarism is seen as unethical because it causes more collective harm than any personal benefit the perpetrator may gain.

Plagiarism can damage the reputation of educational institutions, create inequities in the assessment system, and hinder authentic learning. This practice undermines trust between faculty and students and erodes public trust in the quality of higher education. If this behavior is allowed to persist, the integrity of the entire academic system will be threatened, and the graduates produced will lose credibility in society.(Husain, FM, Al-Shaibani, GKS, & Mahfoodh & A., 2017). Therefore, from a utilitarian perspective, plagiarism is an ethically unjustifiable act because it has long-term negative consequences for the academic community.

3. Virtue Ethics Perspective: Weak Academic Character and Personal Morality

Virtue ethics, as developed by Aristotle and later enriched in the context of modern education, emphasizes the importance of character formation and moral virtue as the core of ethical action.(Mulkhan, Unang Mulkhan, Ahmad Efendi, 2018). In this perspective, honesty, responsibility, and intellectual courage are not merely abstract values, but are qualities that must be built within each individual through habituation and moral learning.

Plagiarism demonstrates the weak character of students as intellectuals who should possess a spirit of honesty and perseverance in their work. Academic ethics is not merely a set of formal rules, but part of the process of developing a human

being with intellectual prowess, a person with depth of knowledge, moral sensitivity, and integrity.(TARIGAN, 2022)Students who uphold virtuous values will be able to resist the temptation to cheat, even under conditions of high academic pressure.

Students with a high level of moral awareness tend to reject plagiarism even in difficult situations. This suggests that character development (virtue) is a key bulwark against unethical behavior.(Sundoro et al., 2025)Therefore, efforts to prevent plagiarism must be directed not only at technical or administrative aspects, but also at strengthening moral education and developing a strong academic personality.

These three approaches, while emphasizing different points of emphasis, all affirm that plagiarism is a serious form of moral deviance. From a deontological perspective, plagiarism is a violation of ethical obligations; from a utilitarian perspective, it is detrimental to the academic community; and from a virtue ethics perspective, it reflects a crisis of character. Therefore, tackling plagiarism must be carried out through a multidimensional approach that combines rule enforcement, character development, and strengthening ethical awareness in every learning process.

C. Causal Factors of Plagiarism and Preventive Strategies: Addressing Structural and Personal Complexities in the Academic World

Plagiarism in higher education cannot be understood solely as the result of individual malice. It is a complex phenomenon arising from the interaction of personal and structural factors. On the one hand, there are internal weaknesses in students, such as low ethical awareness, inadequate scientific writing skills, and a lack of appreciation for the value of academic honesty. On the other hand, the structure of the educational system itself often creates pressure that pushes students to seek shortcuts, including plagiarism.

Students are often faced with high academic loads, tight deadlines, and evaluation systems that emphasize final results over the learning process.

These conditions create psychological stress and performative anxiety, which in many cases are the primary triggers for deviant behavior. Environmental factors such as academic competition, social pressure, and a weak ethical literacy and understanding of scientific integrity also increase the likelihood of students committing plagiarism.(Husain, FM, Al-Shaibani, GKS, & Mahfoodh & A., 2017).

Furthermore, in the context of an academic culture that does not fully support character formation, academic ethics is often understood as an additional aspect separate from the core educational process. Moral education and the development of good manners have not been systematically integrated into the curriculum or into daily practices on campus. This results in values such as responsibility, honesty, and integrity remaining merely jargon, rather than internalized awareness.

Therefore, the solution to the problem of plagiarism cannot rely solely on administrative sanctions. A transformative, preventative approach is needed to build a healthy academic culture. One important strategy is the continuous strengthening of academic ethics education. This education should not only contain rules or prohibitions, but should also address the development of students' character and morality. Academic Ethics, as outlined in Azhari Akmal Tarigan's literature, emphasizes the importance of integrating knowledge and morals.(TARIGAN, 2022). Manners are not merely an accessory, but rather the core of the learning process, which demands honesty, respect for knowledge, and responsibility for the process of seeking truth.

Academic culture reform also needs to be implemented institutionally. From curriculum design and learning methods to assessment systems and even lecturers' role models, everything must be geared toward creating an ethical, educational, and humane academic environment. Higher education institutions must not simply provide anti-plagiarism training or technical guidance on scientific writing; they must also foster values of honesty as part of their students' intellectual identity.

Thus, structural and personal approaches must go hand in hand. Efforts to combat plagiarism require a reformed education system that is more ethical, humanistic, and oriented toward developing academics who are not only intellectually intelligent but also morally and spiritually mature.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusion

Plagiarism among students cannot be viewed simply as a technical or administrative violation, but rather as a reflection of a serious moral crisis. Within a normative ethical framework, this behavior contradicts the principles of deontology, which emphasizes moral obligation, utilitarianism, which considers negative impacts on the academic community, and virtue ethics, which demands the development of noble character traits such as honesty and responsibility. Weak ethical awareness and minimal value development are the primary causes of plagiarism.

Therefore, solutions are needed that are not merely repressive, but also preventative and transformative. Academic ethics education must be internalized in all aspects of campus life, not just at the normative level, but also embodied in learning practices that foster integrity and responsibility. Fair enforcement of ethical codes, strengthening scientific literacy, and moral role models from lecturers and institutions are key to building an honest and dignified academic culture. This collective effort will lay the foundation for creating an ethical and character-driven higher education environment.

B. Suggestion

Addressing plagiarism, a moral crisis among students, requires strategic steps that are not merely repressive but also educational and transformative. Higher education institutions should systematically integrate ethics and academic integrity education into the core curriculum, so that students not only understand the technical prohibitions on plagiarism but also understand the moral foundations behind them. Furthermore, it is crucial for universities to strengthen academic literacy through scientific

writing training and the use of plagiarism detection technology that educates, not punishes. Lecturers also play a crucial role as role models in upholding the values of scientific honesty and as facilitators in shaping responsible student character. Through a synergy between values, education, and the cultivation of integrity, it is hoped that plagiarism can be suppressed and replaced with a more dignified academic culture.

REFERENCE LISTAN

- Abidin, Z., & Harahap, RA (2025). Academic Ethics in the Perspective of Islamic Education. *MUDABBIR Journal Research and Education Studies*, Vol.5(No.1), 435–440.
- Al Ghifari, FH (2025). Manners Before Knowledge: Reactualization of Tarbiyah Values in Basic Islamic Education. *JIRER JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION RESEARCH*, Vol.1(No.1), 12–28.
- Aula, I., Widayanti, R., & Setyanoor, E. (2024). LEGAL PROTECTION EFFORTS IN INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS AGAINST COPYRIGHT PLAGIARISM PRACTICES. *JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS (EKOBIS-DA)*, Vol.5(No.2).
- Fauziah, F., & Maulana, A. (2020). The Phenomenon of Plagiarism Among Students from the Perspective of Islamic Educational Ethics. *Journal of Islamic Education*, Vol. 8 (No. 1), 77–89.
- Halim, Angellina Anastasia, and MPE (2024). THE PROCESS OF ACHIEVING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A STUDY OF OVERACHIEVER AND UNDERACHIEVER STUDENTS. *PROCEEDINGS OF THE UNTAG SAMARINDA PSYCHOLOGY SCIENTIFIC PARADE (PAIS UNDA)*, Vol.1(No.2), 40–51.
- Hamzah, Nur, and RS (2025). ISLAMIC ETHICS AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY: A THEORY OF OBLIGATION AND VIRTUE PERSPECTIVE. *As-Sulthan Journal of Education*, Vol.1(No.3), 527–540.
- Hidayat, Tatang, Ahmad Syamsu Rizal, and FF (2018). Education from an Islamic Perspective and Its Role in Developing Islamic Personality. *Mudarrisuna Journal: Media for Islamic Religious Education Studies*, Vol. 8 (No. 2), 218–244.
- Husain, FM, Al-Shaibani, GKS, & Mahfoodh, OH, & A. (2017). Perceptions of and Attitudes Toward Plagiarism and Factors Contributing to Plagiarism: A Review of Studies. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, Vol.15(No.2), 167–195.

- Izad, R. (2019). The Death Penalty in Indonesia from a Deontological Ethics Perspective. *Al-Syakhsiyyah: Journal of Law and Family Studies*, Vol.1(No.1).
- Mill, JS (2020). Utilitarianism. Basabasi.
- Mulkhan, Unang Mulkhan, Ahmad Efendi, and MD (2018). EXPLORATION OF ARISTOTELIAN Virtue Ethics (AVE) IN DECISION MAKING (Case study on the Regional Government of Lampung Province, Indonesia). repository.lppm.unila.
- Nasywa, A. (2024). Implementation of Anti-Plagiarism Policy and Scientific Writing Ethics in the Indonesian Academic Environment. *Socius: Journal of Social Sciences Research*, Vol. 1 (No. 12).
- Sari, Mike Nurmalia, Nelvia Susmita, and AI (2025). Conducting Library Research. Pradina Pustaka.
- Sundoro, J., Santosa, F., & Sidipratomo, P. (2025). Plagiarism: The Collapse of Ethics, Culture, and Morals of Intellectuals. *Indonesian Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 9 (No. 1).
- Susanto, TTD, Soraya, E., Febriana, A., & Muhidin, A. (2025). Transforming Education to Combat Corruption: Integrating Educational Philosophy and Future Pedagogy. Deepublish.
- Syaharani, D. (2024). Transformation of Academic Ethics of MBKM Student Participants: Exploring Perceptions and Challenges When Returning to Formal Lectures. *Management Economics and Accounting*, Vol. 5(No. 2), 574–589.
- TARIGAN, AA (2022). ACADEMIC ETHICS: Efforts to Realize Ululalbab Humans. Repository of the State Islamic University of North Sumatra.
- Violita, MD (2023). Urban Consumerism: Concept, History, and Its Influence on Lifestyle Patterns (A Critical Study of Immanuel Kant's Deontological Ethics). Nilacakra.
- Weruin, UU (2019). Ethical theories and contributions of philosophers to business ethics. *Journal of Economics and Business Studies*, Vol. 3 (No. 2), 313–322.